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ABSTRACT

A newspaper project for third graders provided an exciting vehicle for putting their language arts, science, math, and social studies curricula to use. Teacher planning included the reading of publications about running a school newspaper and visiting a high school newspaper facility. The children selected their editors by voting, researched factual articles and created fictitious ones, made up headlines, interviewed school personalities, proof read, cut and pasted copy, assembled pages after computing the number of sheets required, and distributed the publication. Two issues were printed during one school year. The publication of the paper allowed each student, whether she/he was a capable reader or a struggling one, a satisfying and important role. Possibly the most valuable outcome grew from the genuine need for cooperative effort. After initial preparation, the teacher's role was to ask appropriate questions, encourage students' efforts, and facilitate project tasks. The teacher had to put in a great many after school hours. The appendix contains letters of congratulations. (RM)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A THIRD GRADE PROJECT: THE FOURTH ESTATE

1983

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The experience eight year olds had creating a newspaper, provided an exciting vehicle for utilizing meaningful language arts, science, math and social studies curriculum. The children selected their editors by vote, researched factual articles and created fictitious ones, interviewed school personalities, typed (in their own fashion), proof read, conceived of headlines, cut and pasted copy, assembled pages after computing the number of sheets required, and finally distributed the publication. The production of this paper allowed each third grader, whether she/he was a capable reader or a struggling one, a satisfying and important role.

The project allowed for a variety of successful learning exposures for individual students as well as for the class. Possibly the most valuable outcome grew from the genuine need for cooperative effort. Because the first publication was well conceived and well received, two issues were printed during one school year. Each issue required hour long work sessions, two or three days per week over a five to six week period. The first issue, of course, required more time than did the second.

As teacher, my tasks, after initial preparations, were to ask appropriate questions, encourage students' efforts, facilitate, through logical steps, the smooth movement from the conceptulization of a publication to the completion of the newspaper. I added hours to my

teaching days typing and deciphering student's copy. Sometimes I found it necessary to recreate words out of jumbled typewritten letters that lacked spacing between them. A classroom of hard working journalists was a bustling one. To have an environment where students were eager, enthusiastic and productive was worthy of any extra effort on my part. Each of us loved it!

Teacher Planning:

I have found the most innovative curriculum rises out of need. A purposeful use for written communication was this need, and the idea of a student newspaper was one possible answer. I wanted to redirect the focus of writing for a small group of students and encourage writing from others. Four sports minded youngsters always selected sports books to read and only showed an interest in writing if it involved athletes or listing of R.B.I's (these initials, I learned, represent Runs Batted In.) The problem was how to harness this interest while stimulating and creating a purpose for writing. The thought of a newspaper with a sports page and room for creative work was a legitimate solution.

Could third graders carry through with all the work required in the creation of a publication? I read How to Run a School Newspaper,[1] The First Book of News[2] and Behind the Newspaper Scene[3] and decided that steps could be simplified and young readers and writers could be responsible for creating a publication of their own. Rather than suggest that the class was to work on a paper, I felt it more effective to spark the children's interest and allow the idea to grow.

The high school and our classroom were in connecting buildings, making it convenient to use their award winning newspaper, The Midway, as a source

for information and possibly inspiration. I visited their facilities before further developing my plans, and received encouragement and support from the faculty advisor. When I asked about my class visiting The Midway office to learn about a newspaper from 'big kids' my colleague agreed.

I assumed it would be too expensive to have a paper of ours reproduced in the print shop; it would be necessary to locate an inexpensive and convenient way to do it within the limits of my budget. The high school office Gestetner Machine transferred typed or written work to a duplicating sheet which could use both sides of a page. It could produce as many copies as required and was available for our use. Both these points were of major consideration and appeared to be easily satisfied.

How could I share the idea with the children? I decided to involve them in a sports event at school that required reporter coverage and could become material for use on a sports page. I thought of attending an after-school practice game and the Physical Education Department cooperated. Children could be the audience to see the practice needed to make a simple feate at a game an accomplishment, while at the same time they could gather material for writing with the idea of getting involved in a newspaper project.

Student Involvement:

Each morning I met with my class to discuss the events of the day at Talking, Listening, Planning Time- (T.L.P.). It was at one of these meetings, early in January, that I introduced the idea of having our class attend a high school sports event. I asked if anyone was interest-

ed in staying after school to watch a basketball practise session. I explained that it would be an opportunity to observe the coach as he talked to his players, to see what athletes do when they are learning a skill, to cheer whenever a basket was made, and to have a good time together. The reaction was enthusiastic.

Interested students were expected to write notes to their parents explaining the plan and requesting permission to remain after school. The class decided what information was required for these permission notes, including a question of how each student was to travel home since we would need to change the usual dismissal routines. Though each note was unique, all the notes covered the important specific information required.

To my delight, eighteen out of twenty-four children brought back positive responses. Reporters were needed to relate the events of the afternoon for the benefit of the children unable to participate. The sportsminded youngsters were urged by their classmates to do the job, and to take notes. They agreed.

Many exciting happenings took place on the afternoon of the practice session and my third graders became absorbed in the basketball plays and players. Some children spent the hour at the drinking fountain and in the washroom, but most of the group became engrossed in the activities. The note takers were involved for the full time that we were in the bleachers.

Two days later, students shared their descriptive words and their illustrations of plays with the entire class. The presentation was well received, and helped everyone feel a part of the afternoon. I learned about 'free throws' and shared my pleasure in the writing, suggesting that their work might have come from a newspaper sports page.

At our next T.L.P. meeting a small group of children asked if the class could have a real newspaper, and the reporters could write sports bews for it. Why not?

The plan jelled better than I had hoped. Everyone seemed excited. Fortunately, no one knew how much work would be involved in creating a class newspaper.

Using a Model:

The children wrote to The Midway editor requesting permission for the class to visit and see how a newspaper is put together. In return, we received an invitation.

Once at the newspaper office, third graders were welcomed by the high schoolers who, in contrast, appeared enormous and very old. Gently and simply they shared information in a friendly and confidential way--one newspaper person to another-- was the tone of the interchange. The class was given a tour of the space and some galley forms, the cut and pasted newspaper copy, samples of proofed articles, along with the negative copy of the edition not yet printed. (Later in the week the final form of the paper was delivered to our room. It was the one the children had watched being put together from its proof pages, to its being set in type cut and pasted in galley form and finally printed.)

The physical layout of the office was of importance to eight year olds. It set the stage for the office we were to establish in our classroom.

Student editors talked about their decision making for news and stories for their pages, about the importance of good reporting work, and how space on each page is divided to make the paper appear interesting. The most important pointer the high schoolers shared, was the real need for

cooperation necessary to get a paper ready for publication.

"It must be a team effort, one person helping another. If ever an editor has too much work, another person volunteers to write headlines or cut copy to fit on a page. Whatever is needed is cooperatively accomplished so the paper is ready in time to meet the printing deadline."

These ideas impressed my children, and often, as they worked in the weeks that followed the visit, a student would talk about the'big kids' really helping each other. It worked for us.....

When our class returned from The Midway office everyone was ready to begin preparations for a paper. A large bulletin board was used to display The Midway galley sheets, their proofed copy and headlines. As work got underway, children added appropriate papers to this board. The first significant pages were Sign-Up sheets, then galley sheets of the third grade paper and finally the completed first issue.

To create an important atmosphere and a feeling of a real newspaper office, I brought my portable electric typewriter to school. Students took turns typing--another sign up sheet. Everyone had time to become familiar with the keyboard before school each morning, in spare moments during the day, and at lunch time. Needless to say, there was a constant stream of children to the typing table.

Group Discussions, Editor Selections:

The overall planning took shape during our TLP meetings. It was here that the idea for the name of the paper was decided upon by vote. The paper became The L.S. News, a compromise between The Laboratory School News and The Lower School Newspaper.

Children decided a paper needed stories, sports, nature and science, news and information about our school. Each of these ideas was used to head a sheet of paper and put on the bulletin board. By signing on the appropriate sheet, every student was to select at least one category that most interested her/him to write about. Surprisingly enough, the group divided itself evenly with four to six names on each page. Some girls and boys had difficulties deciding. Several signed on two sheets, waiting to see which would prove most interesting, or where friends were going to be working, while a few children could not decide to sign any sheet. It was the non-committed children who finally agreed that they would make drawings or cartoons and look for interesting facts, not necessarily original works to fill spaces on a page. The reader we used, Barnell and Loft Series,[4] described little known facts that were facinating to children. They researched from these books most of the 'Did You Know' information. Eventually every student produced her/his own written work and was identified as part of the newspaper staff.

A group, composed of the children listed under one heading, selected an editor. The criteria was based upon a student's ability to shoulder responsibility, facility to help write and correct articles, as well as being capable of making suggestions in a helpful way without being a bully. Anyone interested who felt that she/he qualified could volunteer. Children voted from the list of volunteers, and one was elected.

Three of the four editors was chosen using this criteria. The fourth editor, the one for the Nature and Science Page was selected, not for his leadership or his facility for the written language, but because he was

the most knowledgable student in matters of nature and science. The children recognized and respected these qualities in R. The sense of pride he showed when selected by peers to be the editor was significant. It may have helped his growth throughout the year. R. met with me before school on newspaper working days. We read his reporters' articles together. When he met with his group, Editor R. was comfortable and prepared. His reading improved, he had a genuine incentive.

Students made almost all newspaper related decisions. Peer support and peer pressure moved the children who normally had difficulties being cooperative or prompt with their work assignments. The deadlines were set by children, and were met by them. I continually learned, throughout the project, that eight year olds could handle all the work assignments they created. A good leasson for any teacher to learn.

Editors and Reporters:

Students established their own work space in the classroom newspaper corner. Each editor had a box identified with an IN and an OUT sign for reporters use. The boxes, made from the lids of zerox paper reams were sturdy and adequate in size. First an editor was to accept a reporter's topic, next the article or interview was written and the copy placed in the IN box. It was read by the editor and if approved it was put in the OUT box, ready to be typed. If it needed further work or correcting, it was returned to the writer. The plan, though not always followed, added a professional touch to the newspaper scene.

An editor measured and cut the typed copy to fit in the appropriate place on a page. The final typing was in narrow columns, unless an article was marked to be placed across the full page. Legal size paper was used.

Editors read the newspaper books I put out in the classroom, at least they glanced at parts of each one, but I found most of the work was done by trial and error.

One page editor had able reporters who completed several assignments each, and one reporter who chose to do no work at all. It was this editor who urged and made suggestions that helped and encouraged the student to write about "Kids Cook" (page 1- Appendix) The author was proud of his contribution when the paper was printed.

Measuring space with a ruler was not simple, and the first pasted galley sheet had to be repasted a second time with a headline omitted. The editor had misjudged his centimeters, not enough space for a heading. This experience was helpful to other editors who were also doing lay out work.

During a typical newspaper work period, the room was filled with the sounds and bustle that could have come from a "city desk". Reporters who had interview appointments with school personalities could be heard talking about their four or five questions prepared before setting off for the interview; a small group of reporters might be chuckling over a joke or a great cartoon just written; an editor might be telling her/his staff to make a story longer because it didn't sound right or it didn't fit into the space on the page.

Dictionaries were in constant use. If copy came to me for final typing and a word was written incorrectly, I circled it and marked it 'sp'. The editor then was to check the spelling. Newly learned dictionary skills were needed and put to good use. At one time or another every student used

a dictionary to correct the spelling of a word or to find a definition. I might ask an editor about a word, and she/he would in turn ask a reporter. Often there were discussions about a word settled, not by asking the teacher, but by using a reference book.

Headline writing was fun for some editors who liked to sum up an article to one or two words. It was difficult for others, but once decided a student enjoyed using the rub-on letters for the galley sheets. (We had received a gift of many sheets from a parent) The fancy lettering added importance to the pages.

The lessons I taught about punctuation were now being called into play. Reporters tried to use quotation marks appropriately. It was wonderful to have children aware and proud of using what they had learned.

The idea of interviews interested many reporters. When a sports page reporter decided to interview a basketball star, he selected a Senior player. Both the reporter and the young man interviewed seemed thrilled with the experience. The Director stated that no one had ever asked him what he did when he was directing. He loved it.

In each case the students chose their editors wisely. Each worked conscientiously. When asked to evaluate the project, the class agreed that the editors and reporters worked well together.

It was difficult for the journalists to keep the rubber cement jars closed tightly. Children remembered to use recycled paper for their first copies, but no one seemed able to conserve rubber cement. The original supply was inadequate and had to be reordered.

Establishing Deadlines:

Newspaper work involved timing at every step. Reporters had to fit their interviews into specific time slots. Practise time and then typing

involved time. Not everyone chose to type the final copy that went into the OUT box. Many children seemed satisfied to play at the machine once they discovered it was not a simple task. Still others struggled and produced typed work. Each task needed to be part of the overall schedule set at our TLP meeting.

Once the completed cut-pasted pages had been pasted, it was my task to see to the reproducing. The entire class visited the high school office where the principal demonstrated and explained the Gestetner Machine and how it reproduced the copy. Unfortunately several pages had to be duplicated more than once because the ink supply was inadequate. There were difficulties with the length of the page and some bottom drawings did not reproduce. Some days a student or two stayed after school with me to use the machine.

The project was an enormous undertaking. I was relieved and thrilled when we were ready with the first issue. The children were delighted. We received letters of praise from the Director, the Librarian and others. Why not a second issue?

Early in spring, with a month's rest. the class did begin a second issue. The machinery for the work loads, the skills, the feeling of cooperation was established, making the job easier. A second paper, made up of four double sided sheets was produced. It worked so well that we were sorry to see the year coming to a close.

Curriculum Skills:

Language Arts became a living subject when writing, reading, use of dictionaries, spelling, communicating for an audience fell into its rightful place. The newspaper project was a perfect vehicle for working on needed skills of the Language curriculum.

Science encompassed observations skills, i.e. over feeding fish,

interest in conservation of energy (see Adam's article on Gas). Time was spent reading science magazines, Ranger Rick and International Wildlife in particular, to locate interesting information for the paper. The article on Bear Cubs was a prime example. Children became more aware of the environment, of animal and plant life on it, and shared their awareness and interest through their writings.

As for Math work, students calculated the necessary number of pages that needed to be reproduced. Each student was to receive three personal copies of the newspaper to take home, the people who were interviewed were to receive their copies of L.S. News as was the Director, The Principal, The Midway staff, the Admissions Office and the Library. The children also decided to distribute one copy to each second, third and fourth grade class (four classes in each grade), and we used four pages per newspaper. It certainly was important that we had worked on multiplication tables. Calculating these numbers was so much easier. We needed one hundred twenty copies. Using 500 sheets of paper to a ream, would we have enough paper? Many such problems needed to be answered.

Collating was completed by small groups working around the room. Everyone was responsible for putting together at least five complete papers. Each group had to do quality control to check that the pages were in correct order before the corner was stapled.

In Social Studies children checked on the origins of the people interviewed which lead to locating various countries on the map. It was an interesting realization for the children to learn that the Director's ancestors came from SCotland. A child in the room with the same family background furnished the class with additional information about the country.

One project provided work in Language Arts, Science, Math and Social Studies. Where there great gains after our six weeks of work on the first issue? No testing was done. What I can say, with a clear conscience, was

that all of the work accomplished was creative, constructive, and it utilized skills. It lent itself to cooperative work habits in every aspect of the school day which spilled beyond the newspaper working time. Not every child gained the same things from the project, but that never happens in any classroom. Though not measurable by any known scale, I was convinced that the children acted responsibly and worked hard to accomplish the tasks they set for themselves. How wonderful to find that skills are not learned for skill sake, but because they are tools for learning and are building blocks for future learning.

I heartly recommend newspaper work, as ambitious as ours, or less so, depending on the stamina of the teacher and the make up of the class. The state of The Fourth Estate for us was terriffic.

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4.
Specific Skills Series, Barnell & Loft; Baldwin Press, New York, 1976.

Appendix 1 - Letters

Appendix 2 - Vol. 1, issue 1

Appendix 3 - Vol. 1, issue 2

Gloria Needlman:

I have been a teacher at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools for the past nineteen years, a head teacher in the Nursery School, a third grade teacher and now teaching Kindergarten. During a leave of absence, 1979-80, I created and conducted the first preschool science program for parents and children at the Museum of Science and Industry. I have written numerous articles for educational publications which have appeared or will soon appear in Learning, The Magazine for Creative Teaching, Children Today, The Instructor and The Elementary School Journal.

APPENDIX 1

15.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
THE LABORATORY SCHOOLS
1362 EAST 59TH STREET
CHICAGO · ILLINOIS 60637

April 9, 1980

Ms. Gloria Needlman's
3rd grade class

Thank you for getting us a copy of the Lower School News your class published.

We read all the stories and liked them all.
We also liked the peppy look of the newspaper.

I especially liked the stories on birds.

The sports profides were good, too.

You did a great job, so congratulations!

Wayne Brasler

Wayne Brasler,
Midway adviser

APPENDIX 1

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
THE LABORATORY SCHOOLS
1362 EAST 59TH STREET
CHICAGO · ILLINOIS 60637

Office of the Director

March 20, 1980

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mrs. Needlman and her class

FROM: Bruce McPherson, Director

Congratulations on your excellent edition of L.S. News!

I was impressed by ...

.... the size of the paper (almost like a Sunday Tribune!

.... the variety of interesting news

.... the excellent quality of the writing and editing

.... the excellent spirit of your class in taking on such a big project

Keep up the good work!

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

DATE June 3, 1980

TO Blaine 310 DEPARTMENT

FROM Bruce McPherson DEPARTMENT

IN RE:

Thanks very much for sharing with me a copy of Volume 1, No. 2 of Lower School News. This issue is informative and interesing. I enjoyed the interviews particularly.

Fine work!

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

MEMO
from BLAINE LIBRARY

Wed

Dear Gloria –

I keep forgetting to tell you – your newspaper is glorious! I love the Cunningham interview + the kids cook √ all the Do You Knows √ Trees that Walk – + The Big Mistake (had me in tears!) √ all of it.

Thanks

Iylla